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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to get an idea of students' perceptions of cheating and the frequency with which cheating occurs, a study examined 203 students currently enrolled in public speaking classes from two-year and four-year schools on the East Coast and in the Midwest. The survey was divided into four parts which: (1) gathered biographical information about the students; (2) provided a hypothetical situation and asked if it was cheating; (3) asked them to confess to various forms of cheating they may have committed in a speech class; and (4) asked if they knew anyone else who had cheated. Results indicated that only 95 of the 203 students reported that they had not cheated in some way. Findings suggest that roughly 78% of the students from four-year institutions cheated, while the number at two-year institutions was roughly 57%. (Contains a diagram, 3 tables of data, and 16 references.) (CR)

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Ignorance of the Crime is no Excuse: Do Public Speaking Students Even Know What Cheating Is?

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T. Holm

Ignorance of the Crime is No Excuse:
Do Public Speaking Students Even Know What Cheating Is?

If we are to be fair to students in regards to the issue of academic dishonesty we must begin with the question of whether or not the students actually know what constitutes cheating. Anecdotal evidence would lead me to believe that in many instances they don't. A Stanford student is quoted as saying "I copied my friend's solution to the problem and the written explanation. I was not knowledgeably cheating, but working with someone's ideas and his work" (Mattes, 1992). Many students who would never cheat on a test said they see nothing wrong with copying homework once in awhile.

It would be easy for a student to look at the public speaking course and decide/rationalize that as long as he or she stands and delivers the speech in person he or she is not cheating. The processes of researching, organizing, and documenting a speech may be considered secondary and thus taking advantage of the work someone else has already completed would not be considered cheating. In the same way that someone who bakes a cake mix cake and enters it in a baking contest is not cheating, a student could consider using someone else's outline, research, or ideas not cheating as long as they delivered the speech.

The Crime Statistics

The study of cheating in academia is nothing new. Numerous articles have been written in scholarly publications and the newspapers about the prevalence of cheating in high schools and colleges (Holm, 1997; McCollum, 1996; Genereux &

McLeod, 1995; Schott, 1995; Daniel, Blount, & Ferrell, 1991; Michaels & Miethe, 1989; and Singhal, 1982). One self-report survey has indicated that roughly 80% of students cheat on their assignments (Genereux & McLeod, 1995). Perhaps it is because the bulk of the literature on cheating comes from studies conducted across the curriculum (Aaron & Georgia, 1994; Karlins, Michaels, & Podlogar, 1988; and; Genereux & McLeod, 1995) that the issue of cheating in the public speaking classroom has gone largely unresearched. This may be due in part to the nature of the assignments.

Cheating in a performance class, like public speaking, can be particularly difficult for instructors because of the fleeting nature of the spoken word. It is hard to prove that someone has cheated and in the public speaking classroom it is further complicated by the question of what constitutes cheating. The issue of plagiarism is one that has plagued academia for years. Students taking the general concepts of an author without giving credit to that author, students making up source information for an incomplete bibliography, students who get assignments from students that have taken the class before and turn them in as their own all fall into the category of "cheaters." Those are instances with some kind of tangible evidence -- a paper trail.

With a thousand students at a school being asked to give demonstrative, informative, and persuasive speeches each quarter the chances of several students choosing the same topic are very high. With the informal student mentoring that occurs on most campuses the chance that a former public speaking student would suggest a topic to a current public student is also high. But when students start to share research and outlines, they have crossed the line from collaboration to

cheating. One of the big problems we currently face is that many of the students don't see it that way.

Instructors who feel cheating isn't a critical issue in their classrooms need to look at the research being done on cheating. High schools are filled with cheaters and contrary to what many instructors might think, it is not just a crime of the borderline students trying to get by via whatever means necessary. A survey of high-achieving students surveyed by Who's Who Among American High School Students found that found that 90% indicated cheating was common in their school and 76% of those high-achieving students had cheated personally (Barnett, 1997).

The reports of cheating in college are down a little bit but still pose a significant danger to any hopes of accurate assessment. Cheating is so widespread at the Michigan Institute of Technology that 78 students in a basic computer and engineering class were charged with, and convicted of, cheating (Kaplan, 1994). The students had collaborated on coding assignments even though they knew joint coding was prohibited. Nigel Wilson, Chair of the Committee on Discipline at MIT said that the students were aware that collaboration was prohibited but chose to ignore it "because many regarded the policy as being counter to the dominant student culture" (Kaplan, 1994 p. 4). McCabe & Bowers (1994) report that a 1993 study reveal 52% of students copied from another student on an examination, 27% used crib notes on a test, 54% copied material without citing sources, 29% falsified bibliography data, 14% turned in work done by someone else, and 49% collaborated on work that was to be done individually.

Could They Pick Cheating Out of a Line-Up?

Dr. Stephen Davis relates the conclusions drawn by a broadcast of Prime Time Live dealing with the issue of cheating and some of those conclusions might amaze you. They found that 21% of students did NOT consider using cheat sheets to really be cheating. Dr. Davis explains that "...to many of the new generation of students, there is nothing wrong with cheating in whatever form it happens to take." Dr. Davis and Prime Time Live both indicate that students view college as a "series of obstacles on the way to getting a good job" and you can do whatever it takes to overcome those obstacles and it is okay. It would seem that many students do not even know what cheating is anymore. One disturbing study found that less than half of the students surveyed felt changing data on laboratory experiments was wrong or that copying homework was cheating.

But it is not okay. What students are failing to realize is that the degree only symbolizes the knowledge they are expected to possess. Too many of our students view education as a passive activity. They believe that if they go sit in the classroom and someone spews information at them that they will, through some process of osmosis, acquire that knowledge. An approach like that simply will not work in the basic public speaking classroom. The students must participate; they must involve themselves in *all* aspects of their speeches and must learn to do it for themselves.

When we look at the prevalence of cheating there is one piece of good news. Susan Huang in The Daily Californian relates the findings of a study which indicates that business majors cheat the most and cheating decreased in the humanities. The fewer instances of cheating could be due to the individual performance-based

approaches we take to many of the classes in the humanities. It is hard to cheat when performing an acting scene for a theatre class or when playing the piano for a music course. It isn't, however, hard to cheat in a speech class. Making up sources, misrepresenting sources, using a speech someone else already put together for a different class and getting someone else to put together outlines and/or bibliographies is fairly commonplace cheating.

Where Do They Learn These Things?

Cheating has been around for ages, it is nothing new. Pay-for-paper businesses have been around for years. For a modest sum, a student could purchase a quality paper and hand it in as his/her own. But there are new venues for the students to use when cheating. It is now easier for a student at high school or college to get in touch with a student from high school or college even if they don't know one another. Students meet on the Internet and they exchange ideas and they exchange assignments. The August 2, 1996, Chronicle of Higher Education (McCollum, 1996), tells us about a web site called "School Sucks," which they predict will put the pay-for-paper businesses out of business.

The price of admission to this warehouse of papers is ... a paper. That's right. You submit a paper and in return the database of papers is open to you. You do provide some information such as whether it was a high school or college level paper, what grade you received and what, if any, comments the instructor made about the paper.

Some might contend the students learn to cheat in high school and bring those skills to college. The Detroit News, March 8, 1996 (Hurt) ran an article which indicates the high school themselves are cheating on tests. Teachers and students reported that during the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests the following forms of cheating occurred: 1) Poor students were encouraged to stay home, 2) During the tests students had the correct answers read to them by their teachers, 3) Copies of the test were distributed weeks before and the answers were discussed in class, and 4) Test packets were opened the week before the test and vocabulary words were taught.

These actions caused test scores to rise as much as 300 percent over previous year's scores. Principals in Detroit either denied these accusations or refused to return phone calls (Hurt, 1996). Students learn a number of things from their teachers so the teachers and administrators should be held to an even higher standard.

Cheating in the first degree

The most disturbing information I found while conducting this research was an article form the Baltimore Sun. The article was entitled "70 hurt as students demand right to cheat." The article talked about how students were rioting against teachers and police over the issue of their "right to cheat." They were using rocks, hockey sticks and homemade bombs. The riots occurred after "the killing of a teacher by angry students after he tried to stop cheating at one examination center."

Before you get too worried let me reassure you that this incident occurred in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Obviously this is an extreme situation and far from the situations we experience from semester to semester. But, in the immortal words of television Deputy Barney Fife, "It's time to nip it, nip it in the bud."

What Our Students Think (Why Turn to Crime)

In an attempt to get an idea of our student's perceptions of cheating and the frequency with which cheating occurs a survey was administered to 203 students currently enrolled in public speaking classes. The students were from two-year and four-year schools on the East Coast and Midwest.

The survey was divided into four parts. The first section simply gathered biographical information about the students. The second section provided them with hypothetical situations and asked them to indicate on a scale of one to seven whether or not they felt the described act was cheating. The third section asked them to confess to various forms of cheating they may have committed in a speech class (responses to all questions were kept confidential to facilitate honest responses). The final section asked them if they knew of someone else who had cheated in various ways.

The Usual Suspects (Demographics)

The students represented a cross section of our student population. 149 of the 203 students were between the ages of 17 and 21. 119 (roughly 58%) of the

students surveyed were female and just over 70% were in their first or second year of college.

These would seem to be the typical statistics for most basic public speaking classrooms. There was one student under 17 and one student in the 45-60 year old range. While the bulk of the students were in their first two years there were 10 students who had been in college for more than four years.

Searching for "Just the Facts" (Research Questions)

As mentioned earlier, the first section posed a series of situations and the students were supposed to indicate whether or not they felt the situation described was or was not cheating. The situations represented a combination of cheating and non-cheating situations. The following questions were asked.

1. Would you consider using the outline and research a friend had used in another speech class last year to be cheating if you still had to give the speech yourself?
2. Would you consider using a bibliography page from someone else to be cheating if you had to look up and find the sources yourself, organize the speech yourself and present it yourself?
3. Would you consider it to be cheating if a student took the research and ideas from a term paper they did last semester for another class and turned it into a speech for their speech class?
4. Would you consider it to be cheating if you found an article that had three additional sources in it and you used them citing the original source they were in instead of the secondary source in which you found them (*For example Reader's Digest runs an article on gambling and says the Washington Post said there were X many casinos in Las Vegas and that the Wall Street Journal said gambling generates SX million dollars a year and that Minnesota Fats, in his book, says this about pool sharks, and you list the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post and Minnesota Fats as your sources instead of Reader's Digest*)?
5. Would you consider it to be cheating if your class was required to give sales speeches and one of your classmates sold widgets for a living and gave his/her regular sales presentation in class for that assignment?

6. Would you consider it plagiarism if you were practicing your speech for a friend and when you got done your friend said, "*Hey, I heard a great joke you could use for an opener.*" and you used that joke without telling your audience someone else gave it to you?

7. Would it be considered cheating for a student who worked for a dentist who gave presentations to prison inmates on gum disease to give a speech on gum disease if he/she had never seen the speech the dentist gave, but did use some of the same visual aids the dentist used?

8. Let's say your instructor assigns a speech to entertain as part of the class. Would it be cheating if a student who openly admitted to having no sense of humor had a friend add humor to a speech to make it entertaining because, although the student had spent hours trying to make the speech funny, he/she just couldn't make the speech funny?

9. Let's say a student found a piece of information in a seven year old book that was very important to his/her speech but the instructor has made it clear that all sources should be no more than five years old. The student has tried to find the information elsewhere but hasn't been able to find it. Would you consider it cheating if the student changed the date on the bibliography page to indicate the book was only five years old?

10. Let's say a student has a learning disability that makes it very difficult to organize his/her thoughts. This student also goes to the campus tutoring center where he/she gets peer tutoring. The student has done all of the research for his/her informative speech and brings it to the tutoring center. The tutor then has the student pick out key points that he/she wants to discuss. When the student has done that the tutor says "*Well, make this one your first main point and support that with these two items and then make this you second main point and support that with this source and you can use the one that is left for your third main point and support that with the two remaining pieces of evidence.*" Is this cheating?

11. If someone read a very good article in Newsweek magazine and then basically recapped that article in their own words as their speech, would you consider that unethical?

After reading these situations you might be saying to yourself "Well, many of these are things I don't consider to be cheating." I would agree with you. In general terms, questions three, five, six and seven are not considered cheating. Situation 10 might be considered questionable by some instructors. The questionable component is probably where does "helping" stop and "doing for" begin?

Other situations seem to be blatant cheating. For example numbers one, two, eight, nine and eleven clearly indicate that a student is representing someone else's work as his or her own. For many that defines cheating. Our students don't see that clear distinction.

The remaining question, number four, is not as much a cheating issue as an issue of ethics. What the student is actually doing is failing to check an original source and taking information from a secondary source but giving credit to the original source.

Because so much of the research and editorials on cheating indicates that cheating isn't viewed as a black and white issue but rather it is often a gray area, the students were asked to indicate on a seven point scale where the act described fell on the cheating spectrum. On this scale a one meant, "this is not cheating at all" and seven meant, "this is definitely cheating." The average of the responses has been identified as well as the number of times respondents answered with a one (not cheating at all) or a seven (definitely cheating).

When looking at the results, there are two things worth noting. First, students regard many acts of obvious cheating as perfectly acceptable. Second, some students consider perfectly acceptable acts to be blatant cheating.

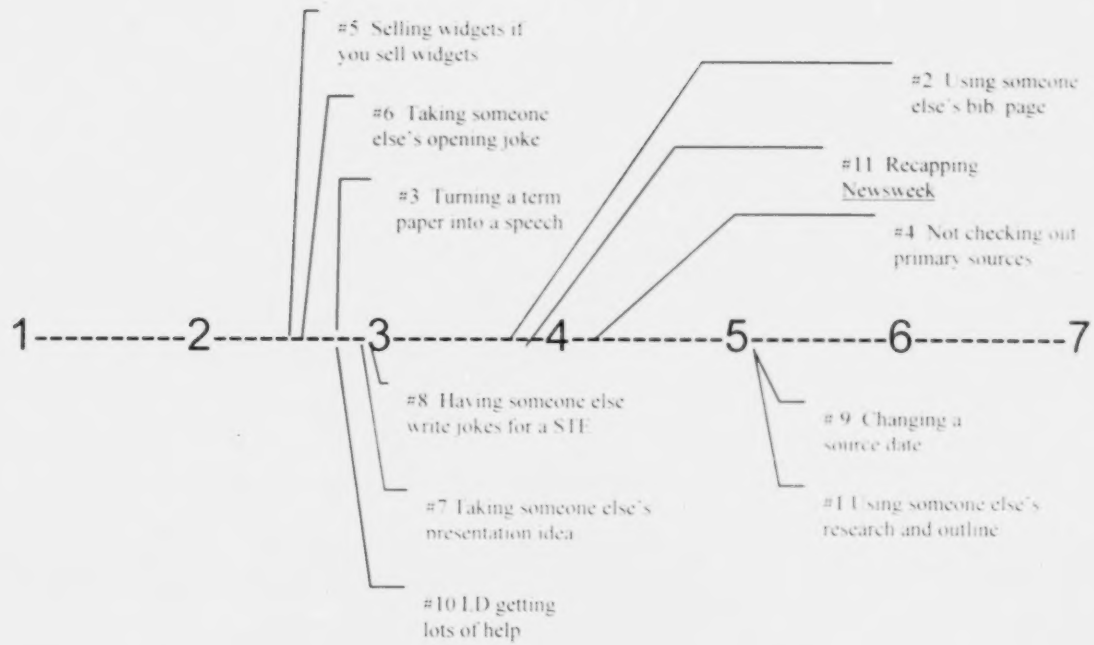
This may actually be the one bright spot in this survey. It is possible that students simply do not understand the concept of what constitutes cheating and that if they knew what was and what was not cheating, the incidents of cheating might decline.

	Question	Average on the scale of 1 - 7	Number that responded "1"	Number that responded "7"
Generally Considered Blatant Cheating	**Question 1**	4.86	11	52
	Question 2	3.46	43	26
	Question 8	2.59	69	6
	Question 9	4.90	19	68
	Question 11	3.67	51	29
Generally Considered Questionable Ethics	**Question 4**	3.98	27	29
	Question 10	2.41	88	12
Generally Considered Acceptable	**Question 3**	2.41	101	15
	Question 5	2.11	107	8
	Question 6	2.20	114	10
	Question 7	2.58	86	13

Plotting it on the Continuum

As mentioned earlier, nothing seems to be completely cheating and nothing seems to be completely not cheating to these students. Almost half of the averages fall between three and five, and nothing got less than a two or more than a five indicating all of the situations are really gray areas for our students. Of course some of the students did indicate that things were definitely cheating and other things were definitely not cheating as appropriate, but they seemed to be the exception rather than the rule

Perhaps most concerning to us should be the fact that none of the situations described fell in the five to seven range nor did any of the situations fall in the one to two range.


#5 Selling widgets if you sell widgets
#6 Taking someone else's opening joke
#3 Turning a term paper into a speech
#2 Using someone else's bib. page
#11 Recapping Newsweek
#4 Not checking out primary sources
1----------2----------3----------4----------5----------6----------7
#8 Having someone else write jokes for a STE
#7 Taking someone else's presentation idea
#10 LD getting lots of help
9 Changing a source date
#1 Using someone else's research and outline

What Crimes Are the Most Offensive (Most Offensive to Least Offensive)

Most Wanted List

1. # 9 Changing a source date.
2. #1 Using someone else's research and outline.
3. #4 Not checking out primary sources
4. #11 Recapping Newsweek
5. #2 Using someone else's bib. page
6. #8 Having someone else write jokes for a STE
7. #7 Taking someone else's presentation idea

8/9. #10 LD getting lots of help [tie]

8/9. #3 Turning a term paper into a speech [tie]

10. #6 Taking someone else's opening joke

12. #5 Selling widgets if you sell widgets

Ignorance of the Crime (What Students See As Cheating)

I really do not know what these students think cheating is if situations 1, 2, 8, 9 & 11 are not "Definitely Cheating." As a matter of fact, those five situations generated a total of 193 responses of "this is not cheating at all" and only 181 responses of "this is definitely cheating." Question number one asked students if it was cheating to take someone else's outline and research and present it as your own. Only 11 students said this was definitely cheating while a whopping 52 said it was definitely not cheating.

Perhaps most concerning is situation #8 where a student tries to write a humorous speech and feels he/she can't so someone else writes it for him/her scored a 2.59. In essence they are saying that having someone write your speech for you is closer to *not cheating at all* than *definitely cheating*. In response to question #8 only six students considered this to be definitely cheating while 69 felt it was not cheating at all. This may be because of sympathy for people without a "sense of humor" but would they apply the same standards to a persuasive speech if the student really tried to persuade but just could not be persuasive? How would it be any different than a student who speak English as a second language giving someone else their research and having that person write their papers for them?

While situations 3, 5, 6 & 7, which are generally considered acceptable, ranked in the bottom half it is also disturbing that the students could not recognize them as acceptable. To the contrary 67 responses of "This is definitely cheating" were made regarding those four situations. Not only do they not know what is cheating; they don't know what is not cheating!

Confessions

Sections three and four of the survey were designed to find out how many of the students would admit to cheating in some form and how many of them knew about others who cheated. The following questions were asked of the students.

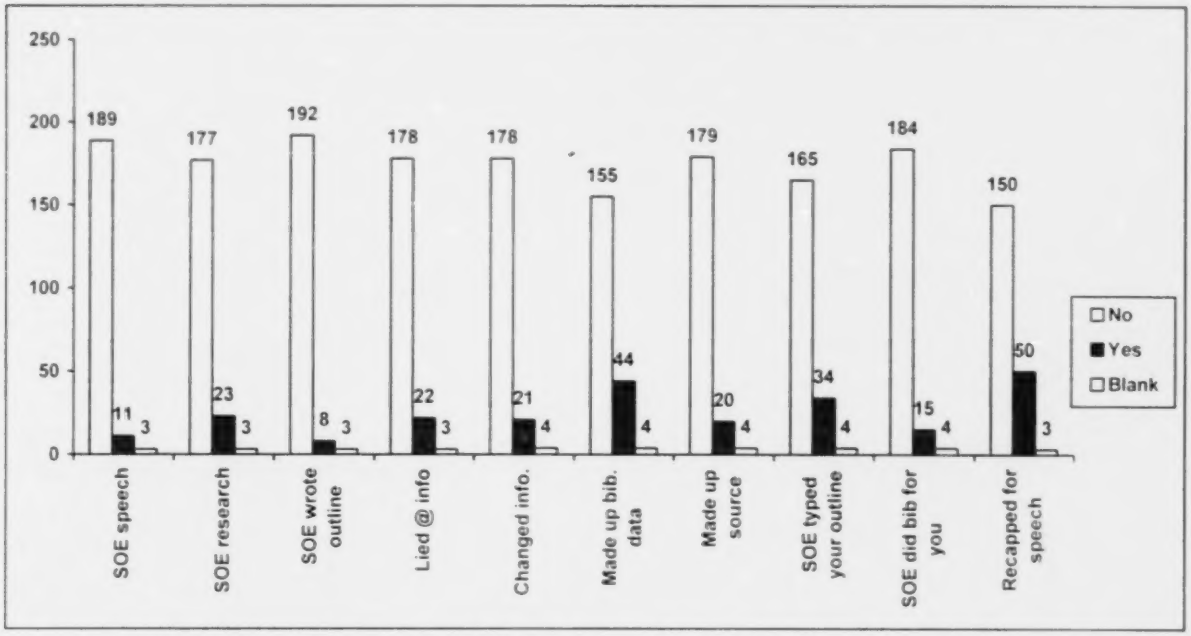
1. In your speech class have you every used a speech someone else had written previously or written for you?
2. In your speech class have you every used research done by someone else for your presentation?
3. In your speech class have you ever had someone else put together an outline for you?
4. In your speech class have you ever lied about where you found your information?
5. In your speech class have you ever changed information you found to make the speech better (i.e. *You find that a problem affects 20,000 people but you tell the audience it affects 50,000 to establish greater significance for the topic*)?
6. In your speech class have you ever made up source information because you were missing some (such as page numbers or author's name)?
7. In your speech class have you ever completely made up a source?
8. In your speech class have you ever had someone else type up an outline that you wrote?
9. In your speech class have you ever had someone else type up your bibliography page because you didn't know the proper format?
10. Have you ever just recapped an article in your own words for a speech assignment?

The same questions were then rephrased to ask if they knew of other people who had done these things.

The Crime Statistics

Self reported indiscretions are not always accurate but it should give us a ball park idea of how often or how many of our students cheat. Students were asked to

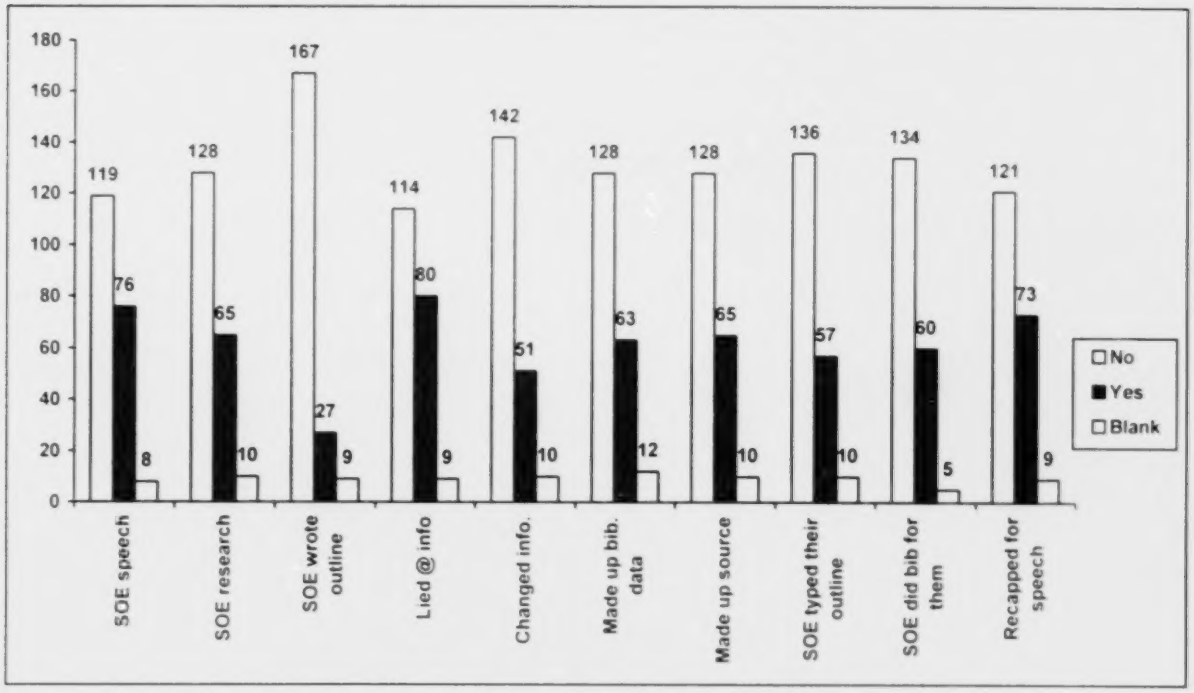
confess the cheating behaviors listed if they had ever personally committed the act of cheating. The following results were obtained.



{The abbreviation SOE in the chart is short for "SomeOne Else" or "SomeOne Else's"}

While the chart does show that far more of our students are *not* cheating than are cheating the fact remains that from 203 students there were 214 acts of cheating (if you eliminate the responses to question number eight regarding students having someone else type an outline they had written). Of the 203 students surveyed only 95 reported that they had not cheated in some way. Cheating appears to be more prevalent at four-year institutions than two-year institutions. Roughly 78% of the students from four-year institutions reported they cheated while the number at two-year institutions was roughly 57%.

Apparently those who do cheat also talk about the fact that they cheat. Students were also asked to report instances in which they personally knew of someone who cheated in a speech class.



The numbers of affirmative responses jumped considerably. While only 22 students lied about where they found information 80 students know someone who did that, and while only 20 of the students made up a source, 65 knew someone else who did it.

Clearly cheating is prevalent in the basic public speaking classroom. If you think your students are not doing it, the numbers would indicate otherwise. We aren't at the point of riots over the right to cheat yet but we are inching that way with every passing year. I have talked with my colleagues from English Departments and they all say that there have been many instances in which they know students have

plagiarized but they just couldn't prove it. Our situation is even more difficult; we don't have the luxury of a hard copy of the speech to use if we do suspect plagiarism. Our students don't seem to think that anything is really "cheating" and we all know that the likelihood of them getting caught is slim.

Where Do We Go From Here

The answer is to go back to the classroom. We start by talking about cheating and plagiarism and what is and what is not cheating. We let them know what is and is not wrong. Crime prevention would seem to be the next, best step. We must look for ways to prevent cheating and ways to punish cheating.

Additional questions are raised by this study, questions that should be addressed in the future. Future studies should explore:

- Whether or not students care if they, or their classmates, cheat?
- What could be done to discourage cheating?
- What impact, if any, an honor code has on cheating habits?
- Students perceptions of how likely it is that a cheater will be caught?
- Why students feel cheating is acceptable?

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